

4 The Beat Goes On: Trance, Dance and Tribalism in Rave Culture

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Rave

Specifically a one-off gathering for late night consumption of pre-recorded dance music, a musical definition of rave is more problematic. Descending from the acid house sound and ethos, the main fare tends to be fast techno and hardcore records, pitched between 125 and 140 bpm and often released on tiny independent labels with little background information.

(Ogg, in Larkin, 1994, p. 302)

INTRODUCTION

Universe's Tribal Gathering 1994, second of its kind, brought together some 25 000 people in a disused 1930s airport outside Munich. Ravers had come from all over the world to dance all night to the sounds of 'superstar' DJs, each with expertise in a particular house dance-music idiom: Carl Cox, British stalwart of European techno and house, Laurent Garnier, France's finest techno spinner, Holland's Miss Djax, whose dialect is hard acid, etc. At an early stage in the event 'a most spectacular occurrence [was] witnessed: a melting together of 8,000 to 10,000 bodies all with hands held in the air' (Koehler, 1994, p. 50).

To characterise rave culture in the mid-1990s is no easy task, as it has grown into an international, predominantly European network of dance-music events at which the participants move to the sounds of techno, hardcore, acid house, trance, gabba, jungle and other variants of house music. These events include festivals (indoor and outdoor, commercial/licensed and free/unlicensed), free 'warehouse' parties (often held in abandoned industrial urban spaces, including factories and warehouses, but also on beaches or common land) and club nights (either one-off events or regular weekly or monthly spots). Some would say that in Britain the rave is dead, killed off by media hype and commercialisation as well as the state's systematic

criminalisation of ravers, others believe that it has gone underground, and still others that it has mutated abroad, with Germany and Holland competing for status as European rave mecca in the north, and Spain and Italy in the south. Perhaps the rave should be compared to the mythological many-headed Hydra, a creature which captivated and entranced, only to make disappear, all those who beheld it, and which mutated inexorably, by growing new heads, when its protagonists attempted to destroy it.

Lack of consistency, of coherence, of veracity characterise representations of rave culture. There are competing versions of many of its landmarks, not only because of differences in personal, political or professional perspectives, but also because of the fluid, slippery and unstable 'nature' of this dance-music movement, which allows no unified perspective and resists definition. It has been difficult therefore to map, with accuracy, its history (even a history of discontinuities and ruptures), especially as I have not been immersed in it as I was in hippie culture of the late 1960s and early 1970s, but have only participated sporadically. What follows therefore is necessarily a partial and provisional analytical account of some aspects of raving. For those with some familiarity with the topic, this should come as no surprise.

Rave culture may be conceived as a microcosm of the contemporary metropolis, which has itself been proposed as a metaphor for postmodernity, that 'condition' which celebrates fragmentation, deconstruction, dispersal, discontinuity, rupture, asubjectivity, ephemerality, superficiality, depthlessness, flatness, meaninglessness, hyperreality, etc. Therefore if rave culture resists definition and analysis using conventional theoretical tools drawn from the human and social sciences, as Redhead suggests (1993, pp. 1–6, 23–4), this is logical, since no totalising meta-narrative can adequately account for something as fragmented, as elusive and as dispersed, yet as apparently indestructible. To describe raving as a ritual of resistance and rebellion is to ignore the explicitly apolitical stance of many of its participants; to analyse it within the conventional dualistic categories of social control/liberation, of individual/collective action, is necessarily to reduce its multiplicity.

The following conception of the metropolis may therefore provide a line of entry into raving: 'a system of anarchic and archaic signs and symbols [and practices] that is constantly and independently self-renewing' (Klotz in Harvey, 1989, p. 83). For definitions of the 'rave' (an expression also used in the 1960s to describe psychedelic partying and which may be outdated, as Saunders [1995, p. 3] suggests), see, for example, Jordan (1995, pp. 128–9) and Rietveld (1993, p. 41).

In this chapter I will explore a number of related issues: the possible

connections between hippie culture of the 1960s and rave culture both conceived as forms of 'neo-tribalism'; the transformation (and commercialisation) of 1980s rave culture from a form of cultural nomadism into a form of settled urban tribalism, and the possible effects on dance 'style' or performance; the role of the disc jockey (DJ) as shamanistic figure with star status and 'magical' powers to induce trance through the manipulation of the musical materials.

THINGS RITUAL AND THINGS TRIBAL: THE HAPPENING AND THE RAVE

Dancing, and especially continuous dancing for prolonged periods of time, is the single most important element, if not the *raison d'être*, of rave culture. This, amongst other things, distinguishes it from its psychedelic counterpart, hippie culture of the 1960s and early 1970s. In the latter, dancing was but one expressive activity in the panoply of liberatory practices, which included radical therapies (such as Reichian vegetotherapy and Laingian psychiatry), meditation, listening to music and the imbibing of hallucinogenic drugs (especially marijuana and LSD [lysergic acid diethylamide], but also peyote and mescaline). Amongst the aims of these practices were getting 'stoned' or 'high', inducing altered states of consciousness (as in 'tripping out on acid') and thereafter transforming socio-cultural realities. Getting 'happy' (symbolised in the late 1980s by the Smiley logo on tee-shirts), with its concomitant feeling of social empathy, is generally the avowed aim of raving. The drug Ecstasy (MDMA or methylenedioxymethamphetamine), which is referred to by law as a psychedelic amphetamine, but which in fact contains no amphetamine (Saunders, 1995, p. 148), despite its energising effects, is, along with dancing, crucial to inducing these feelings of well-being, sociability and gregariousness. (Saunders's carefully researched book *Ecstasy and the Dance Culture* [1995] provides detailed information on Ecstasy and other dance drugs, and on their effects in diverse contexts.)

There is no doubt that the 'feel-good factor' was important in hippie culture, but equally valued was experimentation, artistic, social, sexual and political, which carried with it the possibility of failure as well as success. Rave culture also incorporates elements of experimentation, especially artistic but also socio-political, the aim of which is not however direct counter-cultural contestation, but rather the celebration of values seen as alternative to those of the 'right-wing "*realpolitik*" of the 1980s' (Rubin, 1995). An example of this is Berlin's annual Love Parade, held

along the Kurfurstendamn (the equivalent of Oxford Street) every first weekend of July since 1989, when DJ Dr Motte, the parade's organiser, staged the first event with 'just one hundred and fifty participants on three little trucks' (Motte, 1995). Since its inception, the parade has been a 'registered demonstration for "peace, love and unity"' (*ibid.*). By 1995, this techno street-party demonstration had mobilised some 250 000 ravers dancing for 'hedonism' and 'Peace on Earth', the motto of this year's parade, which called for an immediate cease-fire in Bosnia, Chechnya and Mexico (Koehler, 1995, p. 92)!

A number of further connections shall be made between these two socio-cultural movements. For a more thorough comparative analysis, however, Russell's contribution to *Rave Off* (Redhead, 1993, pp. 91–174) is useful, although I do not entirely concur with his account of the 1960s as I believe that he undervalues the significance and scale of the movement in Britain.

Drug-taking is undeniably central and, in both cases, has clearly precipitated the media furore, as this illegal activity symbolises the absolute otherness and eccentricity of the two cultures to the Establishment of the time. It is, nonetheless, short-sighted to conceive of the drugs as the uniquely psychedelic elements of raving and hippiedom, since dancing, meditation and listening to music are also known to alter the chemistry of the brain and to transform consciousness. Rather it is the combination of elements, their synergy and synchrony, which constitute freaking out and raving, or the rave 'machine assemblage', to borrow from Deleuze and Guattari (1981, p. 50). And the simultaneous bombardment of all the senses, through light-shows, music, drug-taking and dancing *en masse*, instigates what has been analysed, incorrectly perhaps, as a process of 'implosion', a 'mode' or 'ritual of disappearance' (Melechi, 1993, p. 34, 38; Rietveld, 1993, p. 41). For if the postmodern subject is constituted as surface, without depth, as a 'body without organs', then there can be neither implosion nor explosion, only a sliding, a shifting of intensities, which, on reaching a certain degree, transform the quality of the terrain, of that body without organs. Lines of flight are opened up and a process of deterritorialisation set in motion which may lead to a deconstruction of subjectivity, experienced as feelings of dizziness, vertigo, disappearance or loss of self – in other words, to trance. It is not, therefore, the fact of taking Ecstasy which ensures the 'happy' outcome in raving. Rather it is the *repetition* of the same formula on each occasion, the *ritualisation*.

The most striking conclusion was that there was no difference in the happiness level of regular clubbers on drugs and those who weren't. The real difference was between regular and occasional clubbers. Regulars

were nearly twice as happy, whether on drugs or not. So the key to enjoying a rave doesn't seem to be the drugs, but how often you go. You learn to like it, and the way you do that is by going again, and again. (*Rave New World*, 1994, p. 13)

To the rave of the 1980s and 1990s may be juxtaposed the multimedia participatory event of the 1960s, the happening. The happening was a controlled environment for creative experimentation, constituted of disparate artistic elements including light-shows, painted backdrops, live and recorded music, dancing bodies decorated with paint, diaphanous materials, beads and bangles, etc., as well as of impromptu performances and unforeseen events. Within the love and peace ethos of the 1960s, everything was permissible at a 'happening', whence the name which connotes both a notion of process as well as of the unexpected. These events encouraged spontaneity, communication and sensuousness, and were sometimes imbued with an aura of eroticism which stimulated sensuality and sexual exploration. Body contact, hugging and feelings of togetherness formed part of the ideological backdrop, as in raving. The happening too was ritualistic in the way that it combined and orchestrated multimedia elements, but not, perhaps, ritualised. Because it encouraged individual creativity and expression within an ethos of group communication, each event was unique even if the combination of elements was familiar.

While dance may not have been central to hippiedom, it is interesting to note that, in common with trance dancing which characterises raving, 'freaking out' to music usually required dancing alone in order to focus on subjective experience and the feelings (or 'high') induced by the combination of dance, music, drugs and environment. Both dance forms entail sinuous on-the-spot body movements with a focus on spinal vibrations or torso and pelvic contractions (which connect with the rhythm of breathing), while the arms are held aloft and perform wavy movements during moments of trance. In this 'ecstatic syntony' (Schutz in Maffesoli, 1991, pp. 112–14 and 1995, pp. 151–2) which is raving, is celebrated an infinite present, which abnegates the demarcation or segmentation of time characteristic of other modes of dancing, which privilege leg movements and where rhythm becomes a form of spatialisation, as in stepping, walking or running.

The happening, however, unlike the rave for 1990s dance-club culture, was not the focal event of 1960s hippiedom, but, I propose, its symbol. Nonetheless both multimedia events articulate materially an ideology of 'neo-tribalism', which characterises the two cultures. This 'neo-tribalism' is constituted of several strands. There is on the one hand a discourse of

nostalgia, which evokes cultures which are seen as ecologically and socially less exploitative and fragmented. This was epitomised in the hippie idealisation of the commune as the optimum *modus vivendi* and experimentation with a variety of such living arrangements. Rave culture, in turn, recreates elements of hippiedom, which, to a generation raised on Thatcherite individualism and entrepreneurship, represents a paradisiac past, worthy of emulation. Moreover, through the staging of events which bring into play diverse artistic/cultural elements, especially music and dance, both movements replicate liminal rituals in non-Western cultures, the aim of which is also collective celebration and/or trance. I am not suggesting that this is necessarily a conscious process of recuperation and replication, although certainly in both movements there exists a strong and vocal constituency which advocates consciousness transformation through ritualistic practices and drug-taking.

Moreover, if, as the French sociologist Maffesoli (1991 and 1995) suggests, the world is undergoing a form of 'tribalisation', not only along ethnically constituted lines but also through cultural or religious affinities, then rave culture today conforms to, as hippie culture prefigured, this tendency towards the crystallisation of 'sociality' (Maffesoli, 1991, pp. 117, 125) into apolitical associative networks based on affiliation through sentiment and shared interests. Common to these 'tribes' is a certain religiosity, to be taken in its etymological sense of a binding together, an inter-reliance. This concern with fusion and empathy (Turner's 'communitas' [1977, p. 96], perhaps?) as modes of interaction, Maffesoli, after Durkheim, calls an 'organic solidarity' (1995, p. 19), or 'adhesiveness' (1995, p. 174). Concomitant with this postmodern and anti-individualistic form of social aggregation is a rejection of rationality and bourgeois modernist politics based on the notion of the social contract and the law, and of the unified subject of representation. The subject is to be construed as multiple, and as constituted in and through relations, not as actor or author, but as one who is thought or moved, or, perhaps I should say, danced.

Maffesoli (1993 and 1995) privileges the aesthetic, as does Eagleton (1990) with greater circumspection, and proposes the 'aestheticisation' of the social as the *sine qua non* of the postmodern 'tribal' condition, since aesthetics refer to the non-utilitarian, the corporeal and sensate as well as to the collective. To quote Eagleton:

Aesthetics is born as a discourse of the body. In its original [eighteenth century] formulation . . . the term refers not in the first place to art, but, as the Greek *aisthesis* would suggest, to the whole region of human perception and sensation, in contrast to the more rarefied domain of

conceptual thought That territory is nothing less than the whole of our sensate life together – the business of affections and versions, of how the world strikes the body on its sensory surfaces, of that which takes root in the gaze and the guts and all that arises from our most banal, biological insertion into the world It is thus the first stirrings of a primitive materialism – of the body's long inarticulate rebellion against the tyranny of the theoretical. (Eagleton, 1990, p. 13)

Neo-tribalism also entails relations of tactility, of body to body, and the privileging of collective sentiment as the 'glue' which binds people together, not however into a 'union of fullness, a union around a project', but into 'a union of lack, of emptiness; a communion of solitudes' (Maffesoli, 1995, p. 224). These 'viscous' communities (like Deleuze and Guattari's 'multiplicities' [1980, pp. 305–7]) are heterogeneous, unstable, precarious, subject to the inconstancy of passion and emotion. Friction between competing groups is inevitable, and the non-violent resolution of those conflicts through negotiation and other strategies desirable, but not inevitable. Rave culture, as we shall see, is by no means a homogeneous sub-culture. It is a network of competing assemblages, which despite their diversity have, except for a brief period in the late 1980s (see Jordan, 1995, p. 131; Redhead, 1993, pp. 14–20; Russell, 1993, pp. 130–1) when it seemed more a matter of 'war' between the rave machine and the drug machine, eschewed violent confrontation, though they are not without their casualties of death through overdose and/or bodily overheating.

I therefore use the term 'tribalism' in the above senses, because, simultaneously, it evokes the kinds of loose and informal, yet socially (and compulsively) binding networks constituting rave culture, because it articulates elements in the discourse of rave culture and also typifies the rivalry generated between different rave milieux in the mid-1990s.

FROM ACID HOUSE TO 1990S RAVING

For the collective (British) imagination the rave is epitomised by the following 1988 media images: Dionysian revellers high on the recreational drug Ecstasy dancing relentlessly to pounding synthesised music; carloads of young people hovering around telephone boxes at motorway service stations, while they wait for the tip-off indicating the location of a clandestine dance event; police roadblocks, raids and chases through the night to curtail these nocturnal revels. While not inaccurate, these are sensationalist fragments of the history of raving, and fragments which effectively

depict, if not construct, the process of the criminalisation of raving, which has led, during the 1990s, to its attempted containment (in the Foucauldian sense) within the confines of conventional clubland. (See Haines in Saunders, 1995, p. 21; Redhead, 1993, pp. 20–1; Rietveld, 1993, pp. 47–50; Saunders, 1995, pp. 102–3 on the criminalisation of raving.)

The climax of this process was the passing of the 1994 Criminal Justice Bill, which explicitly targeted rave events.

The term 'rave' is even used in the headings in the [Criminal Justice and Public Order] Act [1994]. As defined in the Act, a rave is 'a gathering on land in the open air (including a place partly open to the air) of 100 or more persons (whether or not trespassers) at which amplified music is played during the night (with or without intermissions) and is such as, by reasons of its loudness and duration at the time at which it is played, is likely to cause serious distress to the inhabitants of the locality' If there is an entertainment licence the definition of rave does not apply. (Banks in Saunders, 1995, p. 103)

The CJA has certainly curtailed the number and scale of unlicensed free parties (*vide* the August 1995 *Mixmag* item: 'Police Use Criminal Justice Act to Crush Free Festival' [Petridis, 1995, p. 13], the biggest event of its kind attempted for three years), except where there exists a benevolent police force to turn a blind eye to an ongoing underground network. For example, between February and May 1995, Sunnyside staged four 'free parties' attended by between 12 000 and 15 000 'happy campers' in an abandoned West Country city warehouse near Bristol ('Diplo', 1995, pp. 14–15)! But raving is, as Jordan (1995) elaborates, a 'desiring machine', a machine assemblage, a multiplicity. Therefore it is rhizomatic (Deleuze and Guattari, 1981) and cannot be killed off; its stems will inevitably proliferate despite pruning. 'A rhizome can be broken, snapped off at any point, it shoots out again along one or other of its lines, old or new' (*ibid.*, p. 55). And so with raving!

Indeed it was towards the end of the 1988 'Second Summer of Love' (the first being the hippie summer of 1967) that raving or 'acid house', as this newly popularised youth culture was then called, took to the countryside. Events were staged in empty fields or post-industrial wastelands in a bid to evade the police crackdowns, which were being made increasingly on licensed and above all unlicensed acid-house parties, which had been taking place since the mid-1980s. (See Rietveld, 1993, pp. 45–50; Russell, 1993, p. 100; Staines in Saunders, 1995, pp. 19–21 for further details.) Since 1985–86 or thereabouts acid house had been an underground, predominantly urban, club dance-music scene, which, with its neo-1960s ethos

of love and peace, apparently posed no political threat to anyone, although, through the party scene, it had connections with the squatters' and New Age travellers' movements. It was only when it exploded on to the front pages of the tabloid press that the 'witch-hunts' began and that ravers became nomadic outlaws, pitching tents to party in ever less accessible areas of Britain, such as Blackburn, and later, by 1990 in Leeds and Shropshire (Rietveld, 1993, pp. 48–9), one-time haven of a number of hippie communes. Media hysteria and increasing criminalisation actually precipitated the popularisation of raving as ever greater numbers joined the 'acid-house trail', in quest of all-night unlicensed dance marathons. The summers of 1989 and 1990 may not have been, for the purists, 'authentic' 'summers of love' (but neither were those of 1968, 1969 or 1970 when hippiedom took root); they did however mark the explosion of an unprecedented dance craze, which embraced all comers irrespective of creed, colour, class, gender or age.

The term 'acid house' is shrouded in a number of myths of origin, some attributing to it British, and others American, pedigree. One version (Ogg, in Larkin, 1994, pp. 176, 212) proposes that it descends from the Chicago-based musical movement of the same name, although, in DJs' accounts of that era, I have only found one reference to American *acid* house in the mid-1980s (DJ Pierre in Fleming, 1995, p. 208). Moreover, it is generally agreed that British acid-house dance music combines elements from Chicago house, such as the characteristic kick drum-beat, and from Detroit techno, such as the latter's minimalism and relentless metronomic 4/4 beat, with the peculiar sound of the '303'. That it is a derivative of house music, which emerged in the early 1980s apparently in Chicago, and perhaps also in New York, goes unchallenged. But whether it was initiated by DJ Pierre in 1986 when he discovered the characteristic 'acid squelch' sound while experimenting with a bass synthesiser called the Roland TB 303, which enabled the bass line to be warped and twisted, or by Marshall Jefferson when undertaking similar musical experiments, remains an open question (Ogg in Larkin, 1994, pp. 212, 249). The British tabloid press are cited, in another version of the myth, as being those who attributed the label 'acid house' to raving, the former being a type of music which apparently drove party-goers into a state of frenzy (Rietveld, 1993, p. 45). In a further, and oft-repeated, version the term 'acid' or 'acid burn' is said to be Chicago slang meaning to steal, and by extension to steal musical ideas as in sampling, whence the name for acid house music (Reynolds, 1990, p. 177; Russell, 1993, p. 122). But it is surely Paul Staines (in Saunders, 1995, pp. 18–19) who must, for the time being, have the last word on this search for origins. He claims to have invented this latter story, which

even made it into *Hansard*, the official record of debates in the House of Commons (and House of Lords), in order to placate the British Establishment and discourage anti-party legislation, when he launched the 'Freedom to Party' campaign at the 1989 Conservative Party conference! For indeed as many suspected, the term 'acid' in 'acid-house party' referred initially to the colloquial 1960s expression for LSD, since its use was widespread in the early days of the house dance-music scene in Britain (and America?) before the dissemination of Ecstasy around 1987.

With the demise of the British *underground* acid-house movement towards the end of 1988 and the popularisation and commercialisation of the rave (Melechi, 1993, p. 35; Russell, 1993, pp. 130–1), acid-house music knew a brief period of commercial success before it returned underground when the rave scene dispersed into the partisanship of disparate musical enclaves. However, with the revival of the '303' sound in recent trance music brought back from the Indian hippie mecca of Goa, it has apparently been making a comeback in the mid-1990s but only as a genre amongst many. On the dance-floor acid house has been superseded in popularity since the early 1990s by techno and 'four to the floor' hardcore, the staple fare of hard ravers. More recently 'cheesy' happy hardcore has emerged as the favourite of the under-21s, with jungle being hailed as the potential unifying force to equal acid house, although it is often not considered 'rave' music, due to its connections with reggae, hip-hop and drum 'n' bass.

The explosion into the rave movement of 1988 (to continue until around 1992 with the great 'festi-raves' of Castlemorton and Lechdale) appears to derive from the collision of a number of factors, and to mark a rupture with this previously confined underground (and elitist?) movement. Nascent British dance-club culture was confronted with Balearic all-night revelling, brought back to Britain from the Spanish islands, and especially from Ibiza (Melechi, 1993, pp. 30–3). This had been, with Crete and Kos, the Mediterranean haven of hippie tribalism and drug-taking in the 1960s and early 1970s. A lively holiday dance-club scene flourished there in the mid-1980s due to unrestricted licensing hours, the relaxed gregarious Mediterranean socialising which never begins until 11.00 p.m. with dinner and continues with partying all night, and the easy availability of drugs, especially the newly-arrived Ecstasy. Balearic music was (and still is) characterised by an eclectic sampling of a range of dance-music styles including house, Latin, hip-hop, etc., which contrasted with other dance-music forms in the late mid-1980s, since the latter maintained a certain homogeneity, if only in terms of rhythmic structure. The confrontation, therefore, of Balearic musical eclecticism and of the Mediterranean 'feel-good'

factor with the more puritanical and sectarian intensity of dance-music culture, the British manufacturing and availability of Ecstasy, the proliferation of free house-parties in squats (inspired by Thatcherite pauperisation of Britain's youth) and of warehouse parties, along with an entrenched recession, created the conditions for the explosion of a new youth movement. That it should be a 'dance craze' is no wonder when the cult of the body (as efficient machine and beautiful model) had been under way for some twenty years and was reaching new heights of intensification. Indeed if acid house and raving may be seen as deterritorialisation or even disappearance, it is not only into the nothingness of asubjectivity and the atopia of the postmodern present (Gore, 1995, pp. 137–8; Melechi, 1993, p. 38; Rietveld, 1993, p. 63), rather it is into the infinity of the corporeal surface, the Möbius-like materiality which connects the body and the social, beyond any signification (Deleuze and Guattari's 'body without organs' [1980, pp. 185–204]), 'a place where nobody is, but everybody belongs' (Melechi, 1993, p. 37).

Furthermore I wonder what connections, if any, may be made between this explosion of raving on to the British cultural scene in the summer of 1988 and the financial crash of October 1987, when 'someone peeked behind the reflecting mirrors of US economic policy and, frightened at what they saw there, plunged the world's stock markets into such a fearful crash that nearly a third of the paper value of assets worldwide was written off within a few days' (Harvey, 1989, p. 356). Did the realisation of the factitiousness of paper money produce a devil-may-care attitude amongst the young and disenchanted? Did those who had lost their jobs on the money market decide that one final 'end-of-the-century party' was in order before the slow slide into the oblivion of the year 2000? Or are both these events a function and foretaste of some larger postmodern machine assemblage, a cybernation of the planet? The cyber-rave in which the body which twitches in a techno trance at the outer reaches of danceability at 160–220 bpm is corporeity 'technologised'? 'Perhaps there's a kind of "liberation" in submitting to the mechanics of instinct, soldering the circuitry of desire to the circuitry of the sequencer programmes' (Reynolds with Oldfield, in Reynolds, 1990, p. 177).

By 1989 raving had become popularised, and with it came increasing commercialisation, not only as regards the staging of the event but in terms of the array of accompanying services and merchandising. The popularity of raving produced ever larger one-off events (all-night licensed and unlicensed 'parties') and a mushrooming of clubs (weekly or monthly 'parties' held in the same venue) to cater for increasing demand. From a handful of clubs, such as Delirium, Future, Hedonism, Jungle, the Hacienda's

'Nude' nights, Pyramid, Shoom, Spectrum, Stallions, The Garage and The Project, which introduced house and acid-house music to British youth between 1986 and early 1988, have emerged in the 1990s round-the-week nightly clubs all over Britain to cater to the increasingly fragmented, but hegemonic, dance-music club-culture scene. Not only have the promoters benefited financially from this dance explosion, so too have the DJs. With the acquisition of cult status, they have attained financial and professional security if they make it to the top, for it is upon these 'record spinners' that the success of a rave event depends. And while acid house may have all but died a death, its popularisation of rave culture with its non-violent, anti-individualistic ethos of non-competitive dancing has precipitated a global dance explosion since the early 1990s. Indeed some believe that this global dance-music culture will revolutionise the broader socio-cultural environment, providing a 'human face' to planetary cybernation.

TRANCE, DANCE, MUSIC AND THE DJ AS SHAMAN

As we hurtle toward the 21st century every aspect of culture is being transmuted, the old systems are breaking down and new ones are being spawned.

A new generation of empowered youth is rising, who have experienced a blueprint for the next level of human interaction. In the right environment under the guide of the DJ shaman the collective consciousness is elevated to a higher level: a level that is beyond culture, race, gender or class. A level where you let go your own ego, a level where you experience ultimate freedom. (Betz, 1995)

One of the peculiarities of the acid-house phenomenon (and of the current underground acid-techno-trance scene) was the anonymity conferred on *all* aspects of this dance-music club culture, from its production in 'cottage industry conditions' (Reynolds, 1990, p. 173) to its consumption in ever-changing clubs, publicised by word of mouth. In sharp contrast to the rock music industry, there was no star system. What counted for the participants was only the music (Reynolds, 1990, p. 179; Russell, 1993, p. 129) and its 'danceability', not how it was produced, nor by whom. This depersonalisation of musical production has entailed the death of the singer/songwriter, and paradoxically laid the conditions for the emergence in the 1990s of a new cult figure: the DJ as high priest whose instrument is not the drum but the turntable.

This rupture with mainstream pop was made possible initially by the

appropriation of electronic music technology by house DJs. The accessibility of cheap music synthesisers such as drum and bass machines, developments in MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface) equipment enabling synthesisers to interact, and the increasing sophistication of musical composition and production techniques such as seamless mixing, the layering of sounds and above all sampling have, in the spirit of precursors such as Stockhausen and Souster, revolutionised (and democratised) musical production. American hardhouse DJ Todd Terry, 'the self-proclaimed sample king' (Swanton, 1995, p. 50), has raised this form of musical piracy to a high art by recycling virtually only his own work.

Technology has also enabled DJs to count the number of beats per minute (bpm) in a sample, and therefore to monitor the effects of rhythmic output on consumers and to manipulate 'scientifically' movement on the dance-floor by varying the tempo of the music. Their aim is to create plateaux of intensity, emotional, physical and social, by carrying participants on a journey with danced music. Correlations are made, by ravers and DJs alike, between heartbeat and musical rhythm, measured in bpm, the ideal for inducing trance and for dancing with whole body movement being between 120 and 130 bpm (Macon, personal communication; Orridge, in Reynolds, 1990, p. 184). By alternating sequences of rhythmic intensity, which build towards a climax which is never fully reached, with breaks into chilling electronic ambient, the rushes and ebbs of orgasm are reproduced. Indeed this rhythmic manipulation and the judicious juxtaposition of different musical textures is at the heart of shamanistic techniques of ecstasy which aim to create a dance/music terrain favourable to the induction of trance. The DJ, like the chief priest or shaman, is an expert in a particular dance-music idiom, and it is around these mediators between the realms of the material and the spiritual, of the individual and social that a cult following builds.

In the same way that in the Nigerian Bini pantheon each deity is associated with characteristic musical rhythms and dance steps, songs, costumes and colours (Gore, 1995, p. 137), so in the fragmented dance-music scene of the 1990s, each rave milieu is associated with a musical genre often characterised by its bpm, as well as by the age/social origins of its participants, the emotional impact of the music, dress codes, etc. Thus house, the progenitor of rave music, is an eclectic uplifting mix at 120–126 bpm with a strong 4/4 kick drum sound, often with vocals; it appeals to a broad constituency with support from an older, more 'sophisticated' crowd, as well as from less urbane 'handbag' club-goers of the provinces. Occupying the zone between 120 and 160 bpm is techno, the Detroit counterpart to Chicago house and with connections to European electro-pop and the

early German synthesiser groups such as Kraftwerk, Neu and Tangerine Dream. It uses synthesised sound-layering and little sampling. Fast metronomic 4/4 club techno, which reached its heyday around 1993, is mostly the bastion of white males under 21 with a 'focus on sweaty abandon and sometimes aggressively intense rhythmic manifestos' (Bush, 1995, p. 48). A purist and shrinking scene in Britain, it now thrives in Germany and beyond, where it appeals to a wider audience. The antithesis of modern corporate clubbing, the acid-techno-trance scene represents the political wing of techno. The music, 'a glorious collision of sliding analogue synths, gurgling 303s, racing kickdrums and huge, powerful, epic breakdowns' (Jones, 1995, p. 48), unites a free-thinking underground at illegal free and pay parties. Happy hardcore (or 4-beat) is 160-bpm commercial 'overground' teen music and at the heart of contemporary rave culture. 'Often regarded as little more than a joke on the cooler-than-thou techno and house scenes' (Tope, 1995, p. 61), with its piano riffs and female vocals, it sends entranced teenagers, wearing white gloves, waving glow sticks and blowing whistles and horns, into paroxysms of arm-waving. Also with a tempo of 160 bpm (but without its 4/4 beat) is jungle, a British invention, regularly found in the same venues as happy hardcore but with 'roots' in black music such as rap, reggae and hip-hop. The latter two are said to appeal largely to those from urban working-class backgrounds (Measham, in Saunders, 1995, p. 190). While for the 1990s 'skinheads', the dispossessed and angry, underground gabba at 180–200 bpm and above, where techno has become a 'metabolic rate rather than a music' (Cole, 1995, p. 64), challenges the niceness of the rave scene with the violence of hard beats. Not to be excluded is ambient. Although this is not considered rave music because it is traditionally arrhythmic, electronic, atmospheric background music, it is intrinsic to rave culture as it graces the chill-out rooms and clubs which have been spawned in the 1990s to provide spaces for cooling out.

Since acid house, anonymity and impersonality also generally dominate on the dance floor, which is no longer a space for spectacle and sexual posturing as in 1980s disco (Gore, 1995, p. 134). The boundaries between dancer and spectator have dissolved and 'there's a kind of terrain, a shifting dance environment without borders or destination' (Reynolds, 1990, p. 173). Participants are no longer constituted as dancing subjects by the gaze of the (male?) spectator/other, since subjectivity collapses through focusing on the intensities created by trance-inducing movement and incorporated sound, and on the deterritorialisation which results, rather than on the dramatic effects produced through performing visually pleasing, 'aesthetic' dance movements in time to a music located outside the body. This may

explain why participants are short on verbal commentary to describe the rave experience, since subjectivity and linguistic ability are inextricably linked. (See Lacan's theorising of linguistics and the constitution of subjectivity in, for example, Lemaire, 1977.) In this deconstruction of subjectivity produced by trance dancing, participants shift into a realm of collective consciousness 'where "now" lasts longer' (Reynolds, 1990, p. 180), that is, where the spatio-temporal and social dimensions of the habitual are suspended. Raving becomes a form of positive escapism from the hum-drum constraints of the quotidian, not into the nihilism of heroin addiction, for example, but into the celebratory depersonalisation characteristic of liminal rituals in non-Western cultures. Here the corporeal, the collective and the polyvocal are privileged in contrast to the image-laden despotism of Western stardom where the 'singer is the song', where musical identity is mapped on to facial identity. (See Deleuze and Guattari, 1980, pp. 205–34 on the politics of the face, on *visagéité* ['faceness'].)

As Marshall Jefferson puts it, 'Dance music is faceless' (in Dene, 1994, p. 29), because it lacks identifiable instrumentalists, as well as a singer/songwriter. And to the facelessness of trance dance music, the body responds with either 'dehumanised' movements of individual body parts (as in air-punching or arm-waving) or with whole body vibrations which allow for no hierarchising or privileging of any given body part, unlike in the projective pelvic gyrations to soul music, for example, in which both music and dance require identification for their impact. In the anonymity of raving, 'there is no performance, no stage, no play of identification and seduction, no otherness – only deterritorialisation and the "massive buzz"' (Gore, 1995, p. 138).

With the growth of the rave machine and the proliferation of specialist clubs, it was inevitable that the complete anonymity of acid house would be lost. For acid house was a 'war machine' (Jordan, 1995, p. 133), deterritorialisation of the body social and politic, and as with all such movements, it would inevitably be reterritorialised into new configurations. Thus raving was, for the most part, transformed from nomadic journeying to sedentary tribalism as each dance-music genre developed a profile around specific DJs, who like the chief priests, are simultaneously guardians of a musical tradition as well as potential innovators. This interplay between musical continuity and change is manifest in the tension in rave culture between those DJs who aim to please the crowd and create a good atmosphere by mixing records which are familiar, and those who want to make a musical statement by imposing their own tastes and thus introduce new elements. The most successful DJs, I propose, are those who combine both approaches in a creative style by which they eventually become known.

This notion of style of mixing marks a return to concepts of identity and individual production, of 'authorship', characteristic of the commercial music industry. Moreover the power of the DJ is magnified by the fact that most records have limited distribution in that they are produced only in hundreds of copies each with a 'shelf-life' of around three weeks. The DJ therefore has privileged access to musical knowledge and accrues a musical capital which renders him unique, such that 'every DJ is a sub-genre' (Sasha in Saunders, 1995, p. 207).

It is thus that identity has penetrated the scene of rave culture, as temporary, shifting though partisan alliances are formed around diverse dance-music genres spearheaded by the new star performers. This identificatory process is further manifested by the loyalty demonstrated by participants to a particular dance-music genre, as well as by such obvious markers as appropriate fashion, idiomatic language and other sub-cultural codes. And with this return has come, in certain quarters of corporate clubbing, a renewed interest in structured dance movements which require projection to an audience for their effectivity. On the other hand, an underground rave culture thrives; it remains immune to the commercialisation of dance music and to the professionalisation of DJs, and continues to foster the hedonistic parties and abandoned dancing which have made raving internationally famous.

Rave culture is multiple. It connects elements from the commercial music industry with those of underground rave culture; it creates spaces for deterritorialisation, for the transcendence of identity, for the celebration of communitas; it also confines and pens in, reterritorialising energies released on the dance floor into identification with a musical genre or a mixing style; it bridles the body to its metronomic beats only to produce a collective body without organs; it is rebellion and release, control and containment. And above all it is here to stay, because in the turmoil of the inner city it represents a safe zone for recreational drug-taking and dancing, and because, 'in all its forms, [it] is now as English as fish and chips or football' (Marcus, 1995, p. 46).

NOTE

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